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SUBJECT: WINNING THE "WAR OF IDEAS" IN INDONESIA

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¶1. (U) Post appreciates the opportunity to share our public diplomacy experience in Indonesia and welcomes the Under Secretary's thoughts (reftel). Indonesians, while the largest Muslim-majority population in the world, look at the world differently from the way Middle Easterners do, and we need to tailor our message here.

¶2. (U) Indonesia is a huge archipelago spread over three time zones, with a diverse population, a constitution and national ideology that enshrine tolerance, and a national motto "unity in diversity." Islam spread here through skillful use of existing cultures, not violence or the imposition of outside cultures. The tolerant and non-violent world view of most Indonesian Muslims is evident in two mass organizations, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which boast 90 million members.

¶3. (U) Indonesia is a young democracy and reliable partner in the war on terrorism. Indonesia, therefore, offers unique opportunities to find allies and build support for international values of tolerance and non-violence. Here is how we do it.

POLL RESULTS

¶4. (U) Internal and international polls regularly show that most Indonesians reject violence, oppose terrorism and support GOI efforts to counter terrorism and extremism. Islamic piety is on the rise for sure, with Islamic dress spreading and recent polls showing that a higher percentage of Indonesians pray five times per day than in any other country. But religious tolerance is still widespread and rejection of violence the dominant view.

¶5. (U) Indonesian views of the United States are mixed. While on a people-to-people basis, Americans remain popular, views of the U.S. government and policy are far less favorable. We have seen, however, a real increase in our favorable poll numbers in the past 12 months from 22% to 33%. This increase represents about 25 million people, meaning that, on average, 500,000 Indonesians per week improved their views of the U.S. over the last year.

WHY THE INCREASE?

¶6. (SBU) Positive changes in the international environment certainly played a part in our improved standing here,

especially security improvements in Iraq. But part of our higher image here was through creative and active public diplomacy events at post. We use outreach events to create opportunities for dialogue with Indonesians on issues about which they care. Rather than focusing on issues that divide us, we stress and demonstrate our broad areas of commonality.

Our message is more effective when Indonesians take ownership and when delivered with an Indonesian voice. That is why expanding our educational and cultural exchange programs in a targeted and creative way is so important.

¶17. (SBU) Specifically, we have undertaken a series of highly publicized (especially TV) events with popular institutions, mostly non-government, such as National Geographic, the National Basketball Association, the Eisenhower Foundation, Time Magazine, Star TV, News Corp, and Harley Davidson Motor Cycles to name a few. We realize that U.S. influence and image cannot be improved by the USG acting alone. Business and other non-governmental partners are needed. Our successful outreach campaigns focus on areas where we can win and where we look good, e.g., the U.S. elections, which are uniquely popular here, and ongoing bilateral environmental and educational cooperation.

¶18. (SBU) Education is one area where we see growing win-win results with great potential for PD success. President Bush's education initiative is popular and effective, channeling \$157 million for basic education through USAID. It has improved teacher training, fostered creative thinking, and encouraged parental involvement. Through our successful Fulbright Program (\$10 million annually) hundreds of scholars in both directions have built long-term personal ties and human capacity here. Young Indonesians want to meet Americans and to learn English. Our YES exchange program enables Indonesian students to spend a year in U.S. high schools. Our growing English-language programs help Indonesians receive messages from more sources and compete in the global economy. These exchange programs are especially effective when we can expand and complement them via

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public-private partnerships.

¶19. (SBU) We seek more Washington attention to take educational cooperation to a higher level by linking U.S. and Indonesian universities. Programs like Fulbright are incredibly useful. But they are a "retail" approach to exchanges. We need to develop a "wholesale" approach by attracting U.S. universities to set up shop - or at least feeder programs - here in Indonesia. This would give a greater number of Indonesians access to the American way of thinking at a lower cost. In addition, we are solidifying the foundation of this cooperation by renewing our Fulbright agreement, adding a bilateral MOU to optimize GOI university exchange funds, keeping in closer touch with our many Public Diplomacy alumni, pushing for the return of Peace Corps volunteers and pursuing a Science and Technology Agreement to deepen cooperation in the applied sciences.

AREAS REQUIRING ATTENTION

¶10. (SBU) More resources - staffing as well as funding - are crucial if State's role in public diplomacy is to be up to today's opportunities and threats. We recommend that special attention be given to the recent findings of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy. Its report on the human resource dimension of public diplomacy had some excellent recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of America's efforts to influence Indonesians and others.

¶11. (SBU) Specifically in higher education, the number of Indonesian students in the U.S. continues to decrease, down nearly 50% from the mid-1990s (from 13,000 to 7,000 students). Compare these numbers with the 600,000 Saudi Arabian visas obtained by Indonesians, including thousands of

students. Moreover, as the protector of Mecca and Medina, Saudi Arabia's favorable ratings here beat us by a long shot. The implications of this disparity for the war of ideas are troubling.

¶12. (SBU) The Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s, the relatively high cost of American schools, the increased competition from Australia and others, previous cuts in USG and private scholarship funds and, finally, post-9/11 visa and entrance requirements have all taken their toll. In 2008, we issued only 1,400 student visas here, down from 6,200 in 2000. Clearly, much needs to be done to attract more student visa applicants. We have taken some steps, e.g., our Fulbright program is back to pre-crisis levels, but we need to take a hard look at the other areas, especially post-9/11 security requirements.

¶13. (SBU) The Rice-Chertoff joint vision of "secure borders and open doors" is the right one. Now is the time to recalibrate the security-openness balance to facilitate travel to the U.S. by bona-fide Indonesians. General areas where we can do better include waiving some requirements for returning visa holders and repeat visitors, as well as for beneficiaries of USG exchange programs. The U.S. image continues to suffer from stories of persons travelling to the U.S. being treated in a humiliating or disrespectful way.

¶14. (SBU) As all posts in Muslim-majority countries, we have horror stories to recount: a top official of Indonesia's biggest bank with dozens of prior trips to the U.S. required 13 months to clear Washington's security advisory opinion (SAO) process because of his common Muslim name; the Foreign Ministry's spokesperson accompanying the FM to New York for UN meetings was required to give us his entire travel history in the last ten years - for the second time - before he could get his visa; a female recipient of one of our International Visitor grants was forced by a male inspector to remove her head scarf in the public immigration line at the airport, contrary to DHS policy.

¶15. (SBU) While much could be accomplished by simply applying more expeditious and respectful handling of Indonesian Muslim visitors at our borders, we also recommend two specific changes to the SAO process: eliminating categories that do not add value, such as the Condor requirement, and demanding that all agencies with access to consular data bases adhere to higher data entry standards to minimize the false "hits" that delay clearance of bona-fide travelers with common names.

ISLAM

¶16. (SBU) For Islamic outreach in Indonesia, we use our assistance, exchange and outreach programs to help moderate and tolerant Muslim groups here spread their message, which

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at the same time reinforces our interests and message. It is far better to have Indonesian Muslim groups articulate and demonstrate the benefits of peace, prosperity and tolerance, than for us to talk about it. So we help NU and Muhammadiyah schools, pesantren, madrasahs, health clinics and other community service activities with our assistance and other activities. This engagement makes these and other moderate Muslim groups more capable in delivering services which in turn makes their message (and ours) go farther.

¶17. (SBU) We avoid separating local Muslim groups into good and bad Muslims, embracing the former and isolating the latter. While we obviously ignore the most radical groups and treat the violent groups as objects of law enforcement, rather than public diplomacy, at the same time we try to work with the broadest possible range of Muslim groups here. This effort includes regular outreach and exchange program grants for the major Islamic party here, the Prosperous Justice Party, which, while conservative, is by all accounts

non-violent and committed to democratic principles. We use a range of tools and programs, including American Corners on 11 Indonesian university campuses, TV co-ops, the internet, and small grants to NGOs. These enable us to increase mutual understanding and build trust, thereby sustaining a receptive climate for democratic change and policies that further U.S. interests.

¶18. (SBU) One final point often heard from our Muslim contacts is that we should treat terrorism as a law enforcement issue, and terrorists as criminals. We should not talk about a clash of civilizations or attribute a religious element to terrorist crimes. These contacts believe that calling these criminals and murderers "Islamic terrorists" or "Islamic radicals" only serves to legitimize them in the eyes of some Indonesians by associating their crimes with Islam.

SECURITY SECTOR

¶19. (SBU) Our bilateral security cooperation has been so successful that it requires specific mention. U.S. cooperation with the police and, to a lesser extent, the military has been effective, because it has been behind the scenes. The many successes here against terrorism since 2004 are Indonesian successes, not American. In addition, our modest Pacific Command Military Information Support Team program operates entirely behind the scenes, giving the credit for all anti-violence activities and messaging to the Indonesian security forces.

¶20. (SBU) Our programs to train and build police capacity here go way beyond counter-terrorism, although the Diplomatic Security/Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program training of Indonesia's special counter-terrorism force has been hugely successful. Through International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs-funded Department of Justice programs we have developed with the police new systems and policies on emergency management, the use of force, and (in the works) a major restructuring of Indonesia's criminal procedure code to change the system from a confession-based to an evidence-based system. These programs have helped the police transform themselves from a security force that protects the state in an authoritarian system, as it was ten years ago, to a security force that protects the people in a democracy. This is a big deal and represents a huge foreign policy success both in concrete terms and the war of ideas.

CLOSING

¶21. (SBU) Our main conclusion is simple. Indonesians tune out on verbal campaigns on issues that divide us. We are most effective in Indonesia when we cooperate in concrete areas that are important to the Indonesian people, e.g., education, environment, good governance, and health. This concrete cooperation should remain the focus of our policies, practices and public diplomacy here.

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